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CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
24 September 1985

French admission sparks questions in Greenpeace case

By Christopher Smart
Special to The Christian Science Monitor

Paris

Questions about the Greenpeace affair have intensified rather than diminished in the wake of the French government's admission that its own agents blew up the protest ship July 10.

As a result, the political position of the government of President François Mitterrand has continued to weaken.

The main question is: Who gave the order to sink the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior?

The departures of Defense Minister Charles Hernu and the intelligence chief, Adm. Pierre Lacoste, on Friday did nothing to limit the damage to the government, and Prime Minister

Laurent Fabius's admission Sunday that French agents bombed the ship has done little to calm the fury of speculation either.

While Prime Minister Fabius conceded that the investigator he appointed last month to examine the affair, Bernard Tricot, had been lied to, Mr. Fabius never said who had lied. The confirmation that French agents had been ordered to carry out what amounts to a commando raid on foreign territory is also sure to hurt France's image abroad, analysts said. Mr. Fabius told New Zealand Prime David Lange that he was sorry that the affair had damaged relations between their two countries.



Fabius's admission hasn't calmed fury

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On the morning after the prime minister's surprise announcement observers focused on three main hypotheses to explain the sabotage mission:

- The order could have come from Admiral Lacoste, chief of the overseas intelligence service, acting entirely on his own. Lacoste was fired Friday after he refused to answer questions in writing about the affair submitted by Mr. Hernu.

- The influential daily Le Monde has reported that Hernu himself either ordered the mission or at least knew it was in the works. After weeks of denying any French connection to the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior, Hernu resigned, saying that his subordinates had lied to him.

- Or perhaps the order came from a source even higher up and therefore closer to the President, analysts suggest. The Tricot report, while limiting France's responsibility to that of having ordered surveillance of the Greenpeace organization, said the money for the operation had been approved by Gen. Jean Saulnier, President Mitterrand's top military aide at the time. Hernu is also a very close friend of the President's.

What none of the analysts seem able to answer is why the government would want the Rainbow Warrior scuttled. The ship was about to lead a protest flotilla to France's nuclear test site in the South Pacific, but the French Navy has headed off similar campaigns in the past. The explosions that sank the ship in Auckland, New Zealand, killed one Greenpeace crew member.

Some have suggested that an order may have been misinterpreted or deliberately vague. Focus has been brought back to the report by Mr. Tricot, whose findings have now been discredited, but who revealed a number of curious details.

His report disclosed a note to Hernu from Adm. Henri Fages, director of the French Center for Nuclear Tests, calling on French intelligence agents to "forecast and anticipate the actions of Greenpeace." Tricot said that "anticipate" had been underlined twice, suggesting the slightly sinister connotation of "forestall."

Tricot concluded in the end that the meaning was innocent and that nothing more than a surveillance mission had been ordered.

But the prime minister's admission that a sabotage order was indeed given raises new questions about the note.

There are scores of questions and

hypotheses circulating about the admitted cover-up of the affair and about who actually lied to Tricot.

Monday morning, a European radio station reported that Fabius himself had been informed of the involvement of French agents in the sabotage mission just days after it occurred. Furthermore, according to the report, Mr. Fabius had refused to negotiate about the affair with New Zealand authorities.

The prime minister's office issued a rapid and vigorous denial, calling the report a "fabric of lies."

Still, after weeks of investigative reporting of the affair bubbling away in the headlines, analysts have questioned whether top government officials really learned of the involvement of French agents only over the weekend.

Mr. Fabius said Sunday night that his announcement was based on the initial findings of Paul Quilès, the former minister of urban affairs, housing, and trans-

port, who replaced Hernu. But there has been widespread skepticism.

"It is difficult to imagine that a minister of urban affairs and housing could, in 24 hours, learn what Charles Hernu didn't know after 2½ months," wrote Serge July, editor of the daily Libération.

The President and prime minister now appear particularly vulnerable in this new round of speculation, especially now that Hernu and Lacoste are gone.

Opposition party members have already renewed their cries for Fabius and Mitterrand to accept responsibility for the mission.

Jean-Claude Gaudin, parliamentary leader of the center-right Union for French Democracy, said that the departures of the defense minister and the intelligence chief "do not settle the problem of the real responsibility."

"It is unthinkable," he said, "that the highest authorities of the state were not aware [of the mission]."